

THE NIGHT MY FATHER DIED

my sister called from Houston. She cried a few times while we talked; I felt relieved. Caring for the husk of him had drained Mom's savings. She'd ruptured two vertebrae turning him in bed hourly for five years. He hadn't recognized her once in the last three.

The night my father died, my sister said she felt him go. "It was just after 7:00 — 5:00 your time. This mockingbird that was singing, just stopped. Then something warm fluttered through me." I was in the gym at 5:00, relieved that my back, which I pulled two weeks ago, had almost healed. I went to Safeway afterwards and bought a watermelon on sale for fifteen cents a pound. If any souls fluttered through me, I didn't know.

The night my father died, I returned to my Chinese dinner of twice-cooked pork which the call had interrupted. I made it thrice-cooked in the microwave, and ate it all, wondering how to avoid maxing out my MasterCard to buy a ticket home to Houston. There would be no burial, just a memorial service at the church. I'd stand around being consoled by strangers and a minister who never saw my Dad upright, let alone doing back flips at the pool or mowing the lawn with his shirt off, or kicking me under the table to make me laugh during grace, whispering later, "Religion is a hoax. Don't tell mother!"

The night my father died, I listened to Fats Waller and Beethoven's Ninth, then called the airlines: 1200 dollars round trip, since I hadn't booked in advance. I called my mom and told her I could come, but I'd much rather spend the money to fly her to stay with me. She couldn't stop crying, but said she knew Daddy would like that plan.

The night my father died, I went to bed 10:00, woke at 4:30 when my back tightened up, took an aspirin, and slept straight through till 10 a.m. I don't remember any dreams.

— Charles Webb

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